

# Got To Pull the Pins

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by Ltjg. Pete Wood

**T**hroughout most of my time at the EA-6B FRS, I was mystified by the policy of ECMO 2 or ECMO 3 pulling the command-sequence, gas-generator pins from the forward ejection seats on preflight. I understood the function and the importance of the gas-sequencing mechanism (they control the ejection-delay sequence of each seat), but what made these pins so much more important than the other?

As I pulled these “special” pins for each of my backseat flights, I wondered, “Won’t these pins be pulled by the front crew along with the rest of the seat pins? After all, the pilot and ECMO 1 have to arm their seats as part of the before-takeoff checklist, and all their pins will be stowed anyway, right?” Well, I got the answer to this mystery on one of my last flights at the FRS.

I was preflighting for a night flight as ECMO 1, and we were a bit rushed because our brief ran long. I had a routine system for checking the ejection seat, parachute and seat pan. I started from the top and worked my way to the bottom. Halfway down the seat preflight, I was distracted, and I rushed into the jet. I began my cockpit preflight. We then started engines, contacted clearance for the flight, and began to taxi. I started the before-takeoff checklist, but as I called to arm the seats, I couldn't arm mine. I had forgotten to pull the pins in the lower ejection handle and in the emergency-restraint release handle. The light of reason came on.

What if I had pulled the ejection-handle pins and had forgotten one of the others? I would have been able to arm my seat and we would have gone flying. What if the backseaters hadn't pulled the gas-sequence generator pin? If we had had to command eject, those still-installed pins would have kept ECMO 2 and ECMO 3 in the jet.

Since I've been in the fleet, I've noticed a more cavalier attitude toward getting those special pins pulled by the backseaters. If the importance of



following SOP in this regard hasn't been clear, I hope this tale will dramatize the importance of pulling those two pins for everyone.

This story also sheds light on a recurring problem in aviation: Rushing through any phase of the flight usually translates to missed steps and an unsafe situation. If you feel hurried, you are hurried, and the light should come on that you need to stop, wind the clock, and finish your tasks thoroughly and carefully. 🦅

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